FARMERS WEEKLY

LEVEL
THE FIELD

Working for a more equitable farming industry

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A comprehensive guide to

Neurodiversity-friendly training

How to make learning and development accessible to everyone in your team

Why is neurodiverse training necessary?

As agriculture becomes more regulated and professional, formal training is no longer just for specialists. From health and safety requirements to veterinary medicines certificates and spraying tickets, structured learning is now essential to everyday farm work.

For neurodivergent individuals – those with conditions such as ADHD, autism, dyslexia, or brain injuries – this shift can pose real challenges. In the past, many could quietly work around traditional learning models, relying on hands-on experience.

Staffordshire dairy farmer Liz Haines, who is also **Farmers Weekly's Level the Field campaign** lead, explains: "There used to be ways of flying under the radar, but now you've got to sit down and do the training. And that doesn't always work well for people whose brains are wired a bit differently."

Unlike corporate businesses with HR departments and diversity policies, most farms don't have those structures in place, she points out. "We're mostly small family businesses. No one says: 'here's your diversity training', or asks what workplace accommodations you can offer."

Diagnosed with ADHD later in life, she says her experience is far from unusual in farming. "We've employed loads of people over the years, and it's obvious that neurodivergent people are everywhere in agriculture. But we've never really talked about it as an industry.

What are the benefits?

Making training accessible supports neurodivergent individuals and makes farms safer, more efficient, and more inclusive for everyone. Neurodivergent workers often thrive with clear, structured expectations. Breaking jobs into defined steps and offering regular feedback can help build trust and confidence with your workforce.

Neurodiversity is not a problem to be fixed; it's an asset to be understood and supported. Small, thoughtful changes and training can significantly impact safer, more efficient, and motivated teams. Farms that embrace neurodiversity-friendly training practices are seeing tangible benefits:

- **Smarter innovation and problem-solving** Neurodivergent team members often approach tasks from unique angles. One respondent to **Farmers Weekly's survey** said being particularly meticulous had benefited them during farm audits. "I record absolutely every single condition or scratch on my sheep religiously. I also have all my farm equipment and tools labelled and heavily organised. Doing this gave me 100% on my Quality Meat Scotland assessment two years in a row."

WHY IS NEURODIVERSE TRAINING NECESSARY?

WHEN AND WHERE TO PROVIDE TRAINING

TIPS TO TAILOR TRAINING PLANS

HOW TO MAKE INFORMATION ACCESSIBLE

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN TRAINING

WHY ACCESSIBLE DOCUMENTS MATTER

- **Boosted morale and retention** People stick around when they feel understood and valued. For example, adjusting roles to match natural abilities pays off – an employee with autism might excel at equipment maintenance due to their attention to detail, so changing their responsibilities can make this a core part of their role.
- **A culture of inclusion** Training that accommodates different learning styles benefits neurodivergent workers and the broader team by fostering more transparent communication, better teamwork, and greater adaptability.
- **Safer workplaces** Understanding how individuals process risk differently can improve safety planning. One farmer with autism said in the survey that they were "a lot less likely to take risks," which can help balance high-risk decision-making in areas like machinery use or livestock handling.
- **Tapping into untapped potential** "Without my neurological differences, I would probably never have found a fulfilling career in agriculture," said one respondent. "Agriculture is a broad industry providing a fundamental sense of purpose and connection. It offers a lot to neurodiverse individuals like me."

AUTISM AT A GLANCE

What autism looks like in children
Autism in children can present in a variety of ways, with some common signs including:

- Social interaction challenges
- Difficulty with communication
- Avoiding eye contact

What autism looks like in adults
Autism in adults can manifest differently than in children, often leading to it being less recognised and diagnosed. Common signs include:

- Having a set routine in place and becoming anxious if it changes
- Struggling to verbalise your feelings
- Getting very anxious about social interaction
- Struggling to maintain eye contact with people
- Having an intense interest in activities or topics specific to you

When and where to provide training

You don't need fancy classrooms or high-tech kit to deliver practical training in the workplace. But you do need to think about how, where, and when training takes place, especially when supporting neurodivergent team members.

As part of the Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture's (Tiah's) user research and collaboration with volunteer "cultivators" during the early stages of its neuroinclusive training development, it identified a significant number of people who described themselves as neurodivergent.

"With this in mind, our digital learning modules have been designed to support a wide range of learning preferences and needs, and we are committed to continually improving them," says Karyn Murray, learning experience designer at Tiah.

These simple adjustments can significantly affect how well information is absorbed, retained, and used on the job.

Choose the right time and place
- The location and timing of training sessions can have a bigger impact than you might think.

Accessibility needs
- Neurodivergent individuals may require quiet areas, step-free access or proximity to amenities such as toilets or chill-out spaces.

Routine and consistency
- Predictable timing helps people who rely on structured routines to manage anxiety or executive functioning challenges.

Energy management

- Training scheduled too early, late or for too long can lead to fatigue, particularly for individuals with ADHD, autism, or mental health conditions.

Avoid distractions

Busy yards and farm buildings or noisy machinery can overwhelm or distract learners, particularly those with ADHD or sensory sensitivities. Opt for calm, quiet spaces like a clean office, meeting room or even a tidy breakroom where staff can focus without interruption.

Avoid busy times

- Avoid high-pressure times like lambing, harvest, or milking. Training will work better when people aren't stressed or preoccupied.

Mind the energy dips

- Avoid cramming in training before lunch or at the end of a long day, as hunger and fatigue can significantly reduce focus. Running training sessions mid-morning can make a big difference.

Group or 1:1? Offer the choice

Not everyone learns the same way, so giving people options is a powerful tool to help them feel more in control.

Ask what works for them

- Some find group training energising, while others find it draining and distracting. A quick chat beforehand can help determine the best format, ease anxiety, and improve uptake.

Keep group sizes small

- Limit it to four to six people if you are holding group training. Keep it interactive, allowing everyone to speak and ask questions.

Tips to tailor training plans

When designing training plans for individuals with neurodiverse conditions, one size never fits all. Yet, creating the right kind of support doesn't have to be complicated. Some of the most effective strategies are surprisingly simple. What truly matters is knowing how to combine these approaches to create a powerful, inclusive learning environment.

Getting it right is not just about ticking a box for accessibility. It's about unlocking potential. Neurodiverse individuals bring unique strengths, perspectives, and talents, but these can only shine when training environments are designed with understanding, flexibility, and intention.

Whether you deliver on-the-job instruction, classroom-based training, or digital learning modules, thoughtful adjustments can differentiate between someone thriving and someone struggling silently.

A few practical changes can dramatically improve learning outcomes: clear instructions, varied communication styles, sensory-aware spaces, and opportunities for breaks and reflection. Alone, each of these changes may seem minor, but together, they create a learning environment where neurodiverse individuals feel safe, supported, and empowered to grow.

Make instructions clear

Use simple language, break actions into steps, and consider adding visual aids or checklists. Written follow-ups support those who need to revisit later.

Keep it short and sweet (and revisit often)

Lengthy training sessions can overwhelm anyone, especially those who find focus or processing challenging.

Go little and often

- A 15-20-minute session, followed by a short recap the next day or later in the week, is usually more effective than a single hour-long session once a month.

Build in breaks

- Even short training windows should include moments to pause, ask questions and reflect.
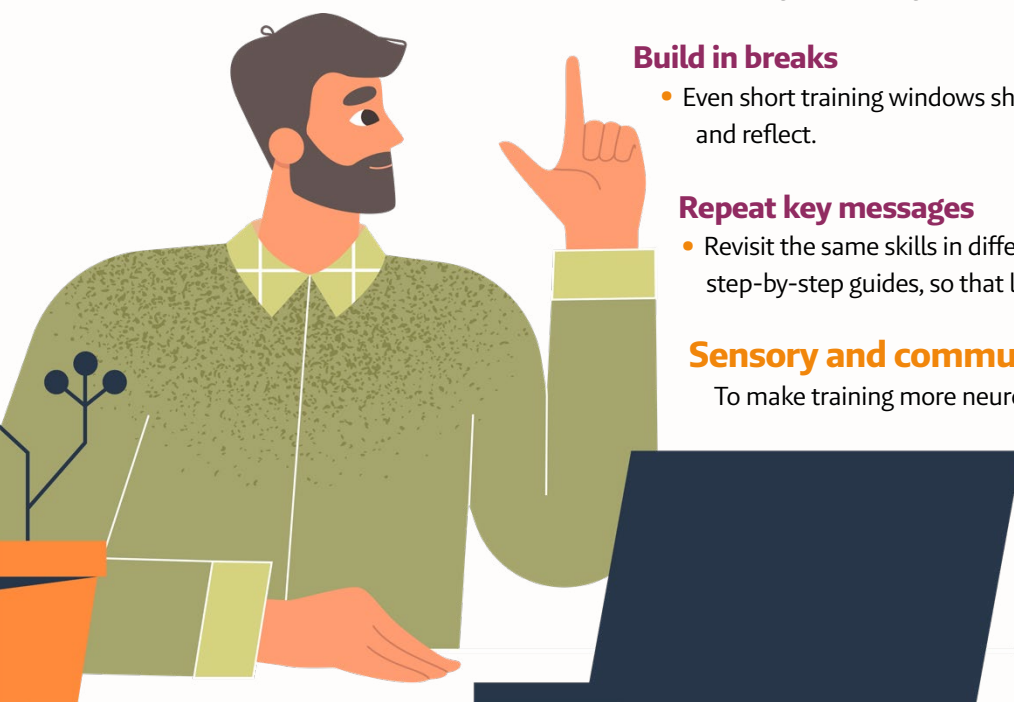
Repeat key messages

- Revisit the same skills in different ways – visuals, demonstrations, step-by-step guides, so that learning sticks.

Sensory and communication considerations

To make training more neuroinclusive, consider the environment and how you share information.

Avoid sensory overload

- Bright lights, strong smells, or loud background noise can make it hard to focus. Simple changes like dimmable lights or offering noise-cancelling headphones can help. Rooms with lots of tiles or

patterns can overwhelm neurodivergent individuals (in particular those with autism) by causing visual overstimulation, distraction, and sensory fatigue, making it harder to focus or feel comfortable.

Give information in advance

Send agendas, checklists or prep notes before training to help neurodivergent employees feel prepared and less anxious. Some people prefer email or diagrams over verbal explanations. Others may benefit from a quick video or face-to-face walkthrough. Offering a mix is helpful for all.

It's especially important to send a map, clear instructions, and venue photos to neurodivergent people before a training course because it helps reduce anxiety and supports accessibility. Here's why:

- **Predictability and structure** – Many neurodivergent individuals, such as those with autism or ADHD, feel more comfortable and less anxious when they can anticipate what to expect
- **Reduced cognitive load** – Clear directions and visual aids help conserve mental energy that might otherwise be spent navigating unfamiliar environments
- **Sensory considerations** – Venue photos allow individuals to prepare for potential sensory triggers (like bright lights and crowded areas), or to bring appropriate supports
- **Improved time management** – Knowing exactly where to go helps prevent stress around being late, which can be a particular concern for people with executive functioning difficulties
- **Increased confidence and independence** – Detailed information empowers individuals to attend without needing extra help or facing unnecessary barriers
- **Use mixed communication channels**

Create a safe learning environment

Everyone learns better when they feel respected and supported, so encourage team members to ask questions and reinforce that there is no judgment. Encourage collaboration over competition.

Build peer support networks

Sometimes the best support comes from colleagues who understand. Peer networks are valuable in training for neurodivergent individuals because they create a supportive space to share experiences, exchange helpful strategies, feel understood without judgment, and build confidence through connection with others who face similar challenges.

Raise awareness

Create optional learning groups or buddy systems where neurodivergent workers can connect, share ideas, and support one another. Offer short sessions on neurodiversity awareness and inclusive practice for the wider business.

Check in regularly

Good training goes hand in hand with good mental health, so checking in regularly will help reduce the stigma that it shouldn't feel like a test. Encourage openness about how they are feeling and if they are struggling, and offer space to talk if needed.

Ask for feedback

Inclusive training should be a two-way street. To improve sessions, ask for regular feedback. A short follow-up chat or anonymous form can provide a platform for honest feedback.
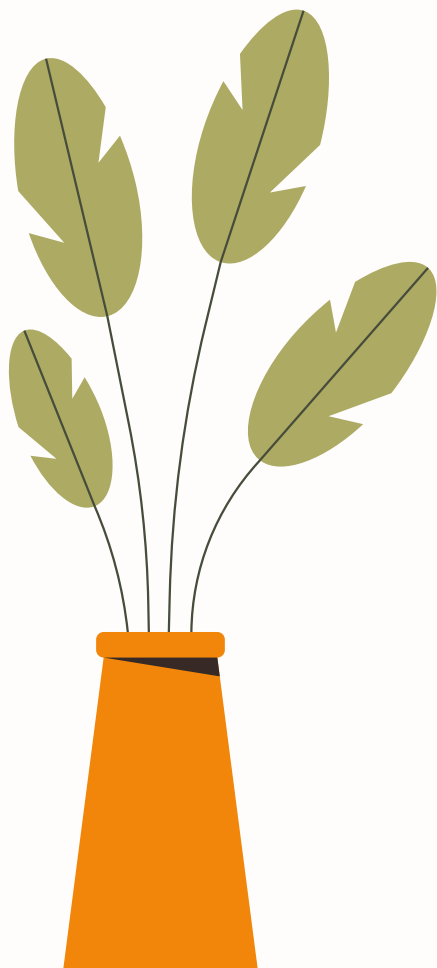
How to make information accessible

Inspired by the diverse user demographics they serve, the Home Office Design System is a set of standards, tools, and guidelines developed by the UK Home Office to help teams design and build consistent, accessible and user-friendly digital services for the public.

It builds on the principles of the broader **Gov.uk Design System** but is tailored specifically for the needs of Home Office services and users.

The Home Office serves some of the most complex and sensitive user journeys in government, like applying for visas, asylum, or citizenship; reporting crime; or managing border checks. The design system helps teams build services that are:

- Accessible
- Secure
- Understandable
- Consistent across departments

Here's how to make your training materials and communication more accessible for everyone on the team.
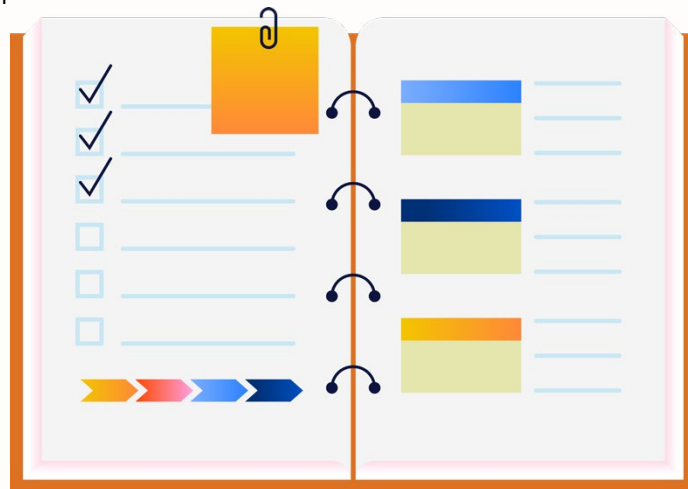
Why clear language matters

Farming tasks often involve precise instructions, forms, safety protocols and time-sensitive work. If your instructions are too long, too complicated, or full of jargon, it increases the chance of mistakes and leaves people feeling excluded or overwhelmed.

"Good training communicates ideas clearly, not complicatedly," says Karyn. "It benefits all learners by making the core message more memorable and meaningful. Reducing cognitive load by using simpler wording allows learners to focus on understanding concepts rather than being distracted by having to decode complex phrasing.

"Promoting inclusion ensures everyone - regardless of language background, learning style, or cognitive profile – can engage equally."

AT A GLANCE

Guidance on using fonts for training

- Use a plain, evenly spaced sans serif font such as Arial and Comic Sans
- Alternatives include Verdana, Tahoma, Century Gothic, Trebuchet
- Font size should be 12-14 point. Some dyslexic readers may request a larger font
- Use dark coloured text on a light (not white) background
- Avoid green and red/pink as these are difficult for colour-blind individuals
- Avoid white backgrounds for paper, computer and visual aids. White can appear too dazzling. Use cream or a soft pastel colour. Some dyslexic people will have their colour preference

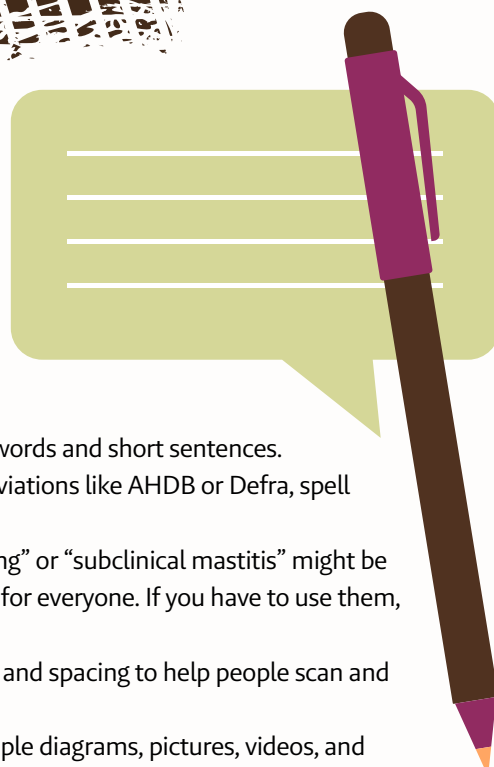*Source: British Dyslexia Association*

Tips for writing clearly

Keep it short and simple: Use everyday words and short sentences.

Define acronyms: If you must use abbreviations like AHDB or Defra, spell them out the first time.

Avoid jargon Terms like "ration balancing" or "subclinical mastitis" might be second nature to you, but they won't be for everyone. If you have to use them, explain clearly what they mean.

Break it up Use headings, bullet points, and spacing to help people scan and absorb the information quickly.

Offer easy-read or visual formats Simple diagrams, pictures, videos, and checklists are often more helpful than paragraphs of text.

Know your team's needs

"With all conditions, the most important thing is to ask people what would be helpful for them," says Liz. "The accommodations for all of these conditions overlap and are probably helpful to each other and to neurotypical people, too.

HOW DIFFERENT PEOPLE BENEFIT FROM DIFFERENT FORMATS AND PLATFORMS

Condition	Challenge	What helps
ADHD	Focus/concentration, sitting still, processing large amounts of information	Short sessions with frequent breaks, opportunities for movement and hands-on learning Finding ways to gamify training (points, prizes) and make it fun and interactive
Dyslexia	Processing long or complex sentences	Short paragraphs, simple steps, the use of visuals
Autistic spectrum conditions	May find idioms or figures of speech confusing	Literal, precise language
Dyscalculia	Difficulties working with numbers which may include mathematics, telling the time, handling money or recognising patterns	Use concrete examples before moving on to abstract concepts, find alternative ways to explain mathematical problems – a different angle may click with the individual. Allow the use of aids such as number lines, number squares and calculators where appropriate
Dyspraxia	Most commonly affects coordination and motor skills but can also impact cognitive processing, time management and organisation particularly towards training processes	Clear structures. Break down instructions into smaller parts and repeat frequently Consider safety concerns when working with machinery

The role of technology in training

For neurodivergent individuals working in agriculture, traditional methods like written manuals or verbal instructions can sometimes be a barrier rather than a bridge. That's where simple, farm-friendly technology can make a big difference.

These tools bring flexible, accessible ways to learn while out in the field:

Video offers clear, visual explanations that learners can watch at their own pace. The ability to pause, rewind and rewatch helps reinforce understanding and reduces pressure to absorb everything at once.

Audio recordings are an excellent option for those who prefer to learn by listening or find reading challenging. Learners can listen while working or moving, making training more flexible and practical.

QR codes provide instant access to extra resources or step-by-step instructions without overwhelming users with too much information upfront. For example, placing QR codes around the farm can link to essential guidance or procedures that learners can access right when they need it, using just their mobile phone.

Audio QR codes can link directly to spoken instructions or voice notes, offering another way to support learners who benefit from hearing information.

Captioned videos and transcripts Videos that include captions or full transcripts support a wide range of learners, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing, those with sensory sensitivities, and those who benefit from reading along.

Infographics combine images, colour and brief text to present information in a clear, visually appealing way. This format helps reduce cognitive load, supports memory and understanding, and can make complex content easier to digest, particularly for visual learners.
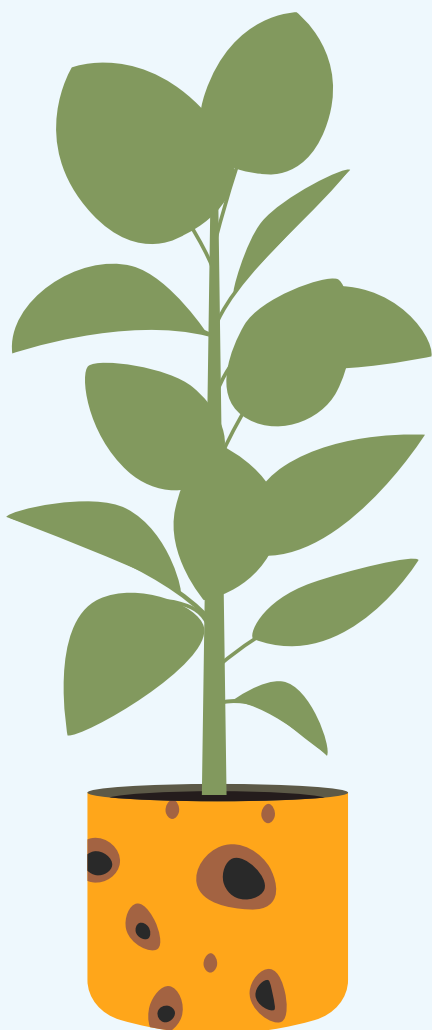
CASE STUDY: SAM PEARSON AND JOHNSON BADA, TIRLUN.AI

When dairy farmer Sam Pearson (pictured) teamed up with agri-tech innovator Johnson Bada, the pair weren't just aiming to build another farm management app, they wanted to fix a problem. Like many farmers, Sam juggled training, delegation and team communication using awkward software that wasn't quite fit for purpose.

The idea for **Tirlun.ai** emerged from a collaboration funded by Innovate UK. "Johnson approached me to ask what our main challenges are on the farm," says Sam, who is based in north Wales

"We had started using existing software to train staff and manage tasks, but it felt clunky. We saw an opportunity to create something more focused – an app dedicated to training and delegation."

At its core, Tirlun.ai allows users to directly record and upload short, topic-specific videos – for example, how to respond when an ACR breaks in the parlour or how to mix milk powder for feeding calves – through the app.

These videos can be transcribed with AI into step-by-step written standard operating procedures (SOPs), then assigned to employees via email. When a video is watched, it is logged, acting as a training record, and then stored on the platform.

This flexible functionality is valuable for neurodivergent individuals, who may benefit from visual learning, step-by-step instructions, and self-paced management. It can also improve overall farm communication and knowledge retention.

"As a farmer, I feel considerably less pressure by having this resource – it's a compounding investment in time and effort," says Sam. "Having somewhere where all information is stored really helps, other people can record short training courses on your farm – your vet, nutritionist, agronomist or mechanic for example."

The idea of improving knowledge-sharing on the farm was a key driver behind the app. "It's highly rewarding when people who work for us develop skills and experience during their time here to progress further in their career. But it can be a loss for our business when they move on if we don't move to retain some of the lessons learned here long term, in some way.

"Having a platform where this farm-specific knowledge can be shared easily with new staff makes the farm run more smoothly."

The app is built to support all types of learners, including neurodivergent individuals. This has become an increasingly important focus after the team learned that 36% of agricultural workers are neurodivergent compared to 16% in the general population.

Tirlun.ai was designed with accessibility in mind: a non-overwhelming dashboard and a simple mobile interface all help create a more comfortable user experience. "The app allows individuals to process information in a way that suits them," says Johnson.

"Whichever way you process information, it shouldn't be a barrier to you having a fulfilling career in agriculture," Johnson adds.
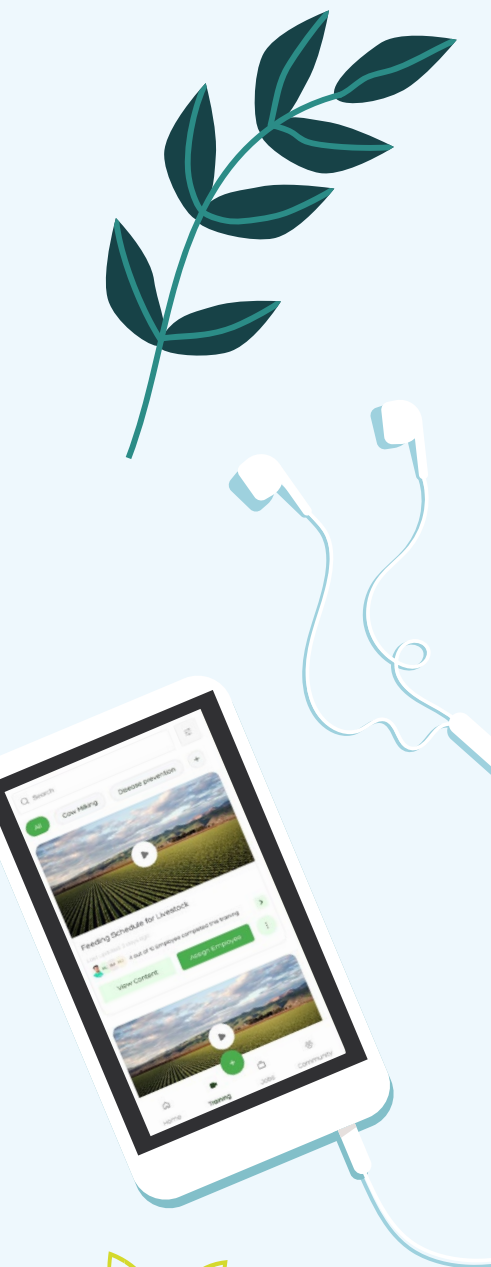
Why accessible documents matter

You don't have to be technical to create straightforward, accessible content. But when documents are packed with dense text, unclear formatting, or jargon, they can become a real challenge, especially for neurodivergent team members.

Simple changes like using plain language, adding visuals, and enabling assistive apps (such as text-to-speech or screen readers) can help workers better understand and follow instructions, reducing errors and improving safety. And for employers, this means a more confident, capable team and smoother daily operations.

These free and easy-to-use tools can help you simplify your training materials so everyone can follow along, no matter how they process information.

Hemingway Editor provides a colour-coded system that highlights specific issues like long sentences that are long or tricky to follow, strips out complicated wording and replaces passive voice to become more active.

Rewordify swaps out difficult words for simpler ones, which is particularly useful for making technical language easier to understand. Rewordify can be used on websites, reading materials, and online learning platforms.

Grammarly is an AI writing assistant that checks writing for clarity, tone, and grammar. It suggests useful improvements and can be used in various apps and websites, including Microsoft Word, Gmail and social media platforms.

Microsoft Word's readability checker is a built-in function spellcheck settings. It analyses your document and provides a score on spelling, conciseness, word length, and the number of complex sentences to show how easy it is to read.

Readable improves the clarity and quality of written content. It offers features like readability analysis, spelling and grammar checks, and style suggestions to help writers create easy-to-understand and engaging content. Readable works across multiple formats, including documents, web pages, and email.

CASE STUDY: NFUS FARMING WITH DYSLEXIA CAMPAIGN

Everyone's brain works differently, but some industries are more equipped to support neurotypical thinking.

NFU Scotland is leading the way in making materials more accessible to dyslexic farmers. More than a decade ago, it launched its **Farming with Dyslexia** campaign to raise awareness, tackle stigma, and highlight the strengths that dyslexic individuals bring to the agricultural workforce.

The **Farmers Weekly survey** found that 42% of respondents identified as dyslexic. 57% were male, and 43% were female, well above the national average and a clear sign that dyslexia is more common in farming than previously recognised.

"As farming is an industry that typically involves lots of day-to-day paperwork and form-filling, it is important that help and support are there for those who need it," says Alison McLean, executive assistant at NFU Scotland.

"The catalyst for the campaign was a farmer who was not diagnosed with dyslexia, but was struggling with various forms, which resulted in fines," she says. "We ran the campaign for several years and still use the findings today."

The campaign has engaged with the Scottish Government and other partners to push for more accessible materials for dyslexic farmers. These include tools like text-to-speech software and coloured overlays to support reading.

As a result of the campaign, the organisation has updated its communication style, adjusting font size and style, spacing and numbering to improve readability for everyone.

"The world has moved on since the campaign, with lots more awareness of neurodiversity and electronic solutions to many difficulties. Our policy director has recently started doing weekly video blogs, which have gone down really well," says Alison.

The survey also found that 89% of dyslexic respondents felt their condition negatively impacted their record-keeping and paperwork, making the case for accessible, user-friendly communication even stronger.

A greater awareness of dyslexia would benefit 62% of the respondents, underscoring just how important inclusive practices are to the future of farming.

DYSLEXIA AT A GLANCE

What is dyslexia?
Dyslexia is a set of processing difficulties that affect the acquisition of reading and writing. Difficulties exist on a continuum and can be experienced to various degrees of severity.

Practical ways to support your staff
- Verbal instructions, rather than in writing
- Assistance technology, like digital recorders or speech-to-text software
- Breaking large tasks into smaller steps
- Creating mind maps, rather than a list

YOUR COMMENTS WELCOME

REGISTER FOR FUTURE LEVEL THE FIELD GUIDES

GIVE FEEDBACK ON THE CAMPAIGN

SOURCES AND EXPERT INPUT PROVIDED BY
- Karyn Murray, learning experience designer, Tiah
- The British Dyslexia Association
- NFU Scotland